

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (Newly amended) A hitch and security system for a trailer that can be towed by a vehicle, said system comprising:

a receiver tube having a first and a second end, said first end extending outside the trailer and said second end being under the trailer, said receiver tube being further rigidly coupled to the trailer and defining a receiver channel extending inwardly from a distal end of the first end of the receiver tube;

a coupling hitch including a coupler adapted to be releasably coupled to the vehicle and an elongated hitch bar adapted to be releasably and snugly received in the receiver channel to the length of the first end of the receiver tube that extends outside the trailer;

a security plug including a security bar being substantially solid metal, having a flange proximate one end of the plug and being adapted to be releasably and snugly received in the receiver channel to the length of the first end of the receiver tube that extends outside the trailer, said flange engaging the distal end of the receiver tube when inserted into the receiver channel; and

an elongated locking pin situating in the first end of the receiver tube;

said system being shiftable between a towing position wherein the coupling hitch is coupled to the receiver tube by the locking pin and a secured position wherein the security plug is coupled to the receiver tube by the locking pin.

2. (Currently amended) The system according to claim 1,

said hitch bar defining a hitch opening extending therethrough,
said security bar defining a plug opening extending therethrough,
said receiver tube defining a receiver hole, said receiver hole being in the first end of the receiver tube,
said locking pin extending through the receiver hole and the hitch opening when the system is in the towing position,
said locking pin extending through the receiver hole and the plug opening when the system is in the secured position.

3. (Canceled)

4. The system according to claim 23,

said coupling hitch including a lip proximate the junction of the hitch bar and the coupler,

lip engaging the distal end of the receiver tube when the system is in the towing position.

5. The system according to claim 2,

said locking pin comprising a generally cylindrical elongated main body presenting first and second ends,

said locking pin including a fixed collar rigidly coupled to the first end of the main body,

said locking pin including a removable collar rigidly coupled to the first end of the main body,

said locking pin being shiftable between a locked position wherein the removable collar is coupled to the main body and an unlocked position wherein the removable collar is decoupled from the main body,

said locking pin being in the locked position when the system is in the towing position and the secured position.

6. (Canceled)

7. (Previously amended) The system according to claim 5; said removable collar including a key,

said removable collar including a key-activated locking mechanism that only allows the removable collar to be coupled or decoupled from the main body when the key is received in the locking mechanism.

8. An apparatus comprising:

a trailer including a receiver tube having a first and a second end, said first end extending outside the trailer and said second end being under the trailer, said receiver tube further defining a receiver channel extending inwardly from a distal end of the first end of the receiver tube, said receiver tube defining a pair of substantially aligned receiver holes positioned on generally opposite sides~~ends~~ of the receiver tube

in the first end of the receiver tube, said receiver holes being spaced a first distance from the distal end of the receiver tube;

a coupling hitch including a socket hitch defining a tow ball- receiving socket and an elongated hitch bar adapted to be releasably and snugly received in the receiver channel to the length of the first end of the receiver tube that extends outside the trailer, said hitch bar defining a hitch opening extending entirely through the hitch bar, said coupling hitch presenting a protruding lip proximate the hitch bar, said hitch opening being spaced a second distance from the lip;

a security plug including a security bar being substantially solid metal and having a flange proximate one end of the plug and being adapted to be releasably and snugly received in the receiver channel and a protruding flange proximate the security bar, said security bar defining a plug opening extending entirely through the security bar, said plug opening being spaced a third distance from the flange; and

a key-actuated locking pin including a generally cylindrical main body presenting first and second ends, said locking pin including a fixed collar coupled to the first end and a -releasable collar releasably coupleable to the second end, said main body being configured to be slideably and releasably received in the receiver holes, the hitch opening, and the plug opening, said first, second, and third distances being substantially equal.

9. The apparatus according to claim 8,

said apparatus being shiftable between a towing position wherein the locking pin extends through the receiver openings and the hitch opening and a secured position wherein the locking pin extends through the receiver holes and the plug opening.

10. The apparatus according to claim 9,

said locking pin being shiftable between a locked position wherein the removable collar is coupled to the main body and an unlocked position wherein the removable collar is decoupled from the main body,

said locking pin being in the locked position when the apparatus is in the towing position and the secured position.

11. (Newly amended) A method of securing a trailer, said method comprising the steps of:

a) removing a coupling hitch from a receiver tube of the trailer;

b) inserting a security plug of substantially solid metal in the receiver tube, said security plug extending to the length of the receiver tube that extends outside the trailer;

c) extending a locking pin through the receiver tube and the security plug at the length of the receiver tube that extends outside the trailer, thereby securing the security plug in receiver tube; and

d) locking the locking pin in the receiver tube and the security plug so that unauthorized removal of the locking pin from the receiver tube and the security plug is prevented.

12. (Previously amended) The method according to claim 11,
step (a) including, removing the locking pin from the receiver tube and the coupling
hitch.

13. The method according to claim 12,
step a) including, using a key to decouple a locking mechanism of the locking pin
from a main body of the locking pin.

14. The method according to claim 13,
step d) including using the key to couple the locking mechanism of the locking pin to
the main body of the locking pin

15. The method according to claim 14;
and (e) prior to step (a), towing the trailer with a vehicle by coupling the coupling
hitch to a standard towing element on the vehicle.

16. The method according to claim 11; and
(f) prior to step (a), modifying the trailer to include the receiver tube.

17. The method according to claim 16,
step (f) including removing a standard hitch from the trailer, extending the receiver
tube under the trailer at least one-fourth the length of the trailer, and welding the
receiver tube to the trailer.

18. The method according to claim 17,
step (f) including welding of a cross member extending substantially perpendicular to
the receiver tube to the trailer and the receiver tube.